1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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INTRODUCTION

The distinctive qualities of Malta first exerted their attraction on us over fifteen years ago. In 1954 an opportunity for closer study occurred and we developed the idea of undertaking some form of geographical survey. 114 121

When the authors made a preliminary survey of documentary source material, their first reaction was one of surprise at the relative paucity of literature available: although since that time there has been an improvement in the quality, extent and accessibility of studies relating to the Islands, this original impression persists. Smallness in overall area and in population numbers might be held responsible for such a limited degree of intellectual interest; and yet the true importance of Malta has been out of all proportion to mere size. The number of references quoted below might seem a rebuttal of these assertions. Indeed in total amount the material extant is superficially impressive. However, with certain significant exceptions, many studies prove to be unreliable either because of their uncritical acceptance of earlier dicta, or because analyses are relatively superficial in that they lack foundation upon direct observation and on the cross-checking given by comparative studies in related fields. These introductory remarks are intended not as complacent and destructive criticism but rather as a partial explanation and justification of the wide but not definitive range of our work. The research on which our book is based commenced as a sample study of land utilization. Because however of the difficulty of accepting other than very few statements as authoritative it became essential to undertake simultaneous inquiries in varied fields.

Equally important as a reason for attempting a relatively comprehensive coverage of affairs Maltese is the fact that in these strange, perhaps unique, islands the interweave of human and non-human elements is so close. Approach to a single isolated problem leads extraordinarily rapidly to all other parts of the complex, more quickly and completely than we have observed elsewhere. Whatever the starting point; micro-climate or semantics, hoe-types or constitutional history, any sustained investigation involves a mass of varied but inter-related problems. 114 121 182

The first simple project evolved for these reasons into a complex scheme carried out under the auspices of two Universities, two Governments, and in association with two Civil Services as well as other organizations, British, Maltese and international. We have therefore also experienced the need and received the opportunity of testing and experimenting with various techniques of geographical research. Circumstances allowed the participation of a relatively large number of workers of differing levels in experience. Besides full-time researchers at postgraduate level and a number of university teachers who made Malta a specific interest, there was scope for drawing upon the energy and enthusiasm of undergraduate members of the Department. In this way, the terrain could be fully covered and geography practised through the soles of the feet, with every part surveyed by personal observation on the ground. During the more or less parallel investigations therefore made necessary it has been possible to reconcile the methods of team research without restricting the freedom of the individuals concerned, whilst at the same time the Field Directors have been able to survey the whole of the work and take part in all of its constituent elements. It has been very reassuring to find that the checks provided by consequent overlapping have been consistently favourable. 114

As professional geographers, we welcome an opportunity of stating a belief that has lain in our minds throughout our work in Malta and elsewhere, and that experience has only served to confirm. This is that geography implies first, field observation of conditions relating to the way men live; secondly a willingness to trace a relationship through, and if necessary beyond the formal bounds normally assigned to a particular academic discipline. Thirdly, in order to give the whole process form and meaning, the operation must be rooted in a physical regional framework - this is what makes our approach 'geography' rather 121

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SECTION IV

Chapter XI

An Assessment of the Cultural Landscape

In this book we have attempted to portray the Maltese Islands 'in the round'. Deficiencies and omissions occur; the former unfortunate, the latter equally unfortunate but also deliberate because of space limitations. Nevertheless, we believe that our study, such as it is, has illustrated certain points of value. First, and this is a geographical truism, the relationship between man and the land on which he lives is infinitely complex. In the case of Malta this relationship is also astoundingly complete and coherent, so that alteration in any one part may provoke repercussions on all the rest. Hence, under these circumstances, change of any kind should be introduced with extreme caution; it has been demonstrated that lines of action which seem apparently well-found and reasonable at the time of inception can have wholly unforeseen and unintentional consequences. This warning has a general as well as local validity. Further, and in the light of this situation, it becomes essential to have as full a knowledge as possible of local conditions before undertaking action. Such knowledge can only be acquired through observation, which must be as complete and detailed as financial resources allow.

Thirdly, investigation of the use man makes of his surroundings leads to the conclusion that, in a last analysis, it is not the actual physical conditions which control man's activities - it is the view that man himself takes of what can or cannot be done which really matters. From the physical standpoint Malta is a highly typical Mediterranean country, yet we still do not know why the vine and the olive, these most characteristic plants, have hitherto only made temporary invasions of Malta. We do however know that the factors behind this were not physical - e.g. climate or to do with soil. It would thus seem to be the way man actually estimates the physical potentialities of his home region that governs what takes place - put in another way, we may say that environment finally exists only in the minds of men. In such a form it can appear intractable, offering insuperable obstacles, and mysterious in its effects. Hence, resource use should not be thought of solely as a routine controlled by physical media, but as a process in which temperament and attitudes of mind are involved. Recognition of the human factor as indissolubly associated with the physical elements of geography underlies our approach: and it is in this sense that our subtitle 'Background to Development' should be interpreted.

Lastly, there is an opportunity to draw together some of the threads which we have unravelled from the general weave, and summarise the main themes.

The principal conclusion is that everything one sees in Malta, other than the major topographical features, is man-made and man-maintained in existence. For this reason there is an unstable equilibrium that eternally threatens to collapse.

Physical environment is fundamentally harsh. The component rocks consist almost entirely of fissured and fractured Tertiary calcareous series, mostly of Miocene age; and natural accumulation of relatively insoluble inorganic soil aggregates is very slow everywhere except on the narrow outcrops of the Blue Clays. There is complete absence of surface water and subsurface moisture is small. Only in the western half of the Island do non-saline water-tables now rise near to ground level over appreciable areas, and only in one restricted area in the east - at Marsa - has this been even historically important. Malta has a highly accidented topography. The western half of the Island is heavily faulted and forms a region of scarpland and faulted basins. The eastern area has more subdued relief particularly in its central and eastern parts, but even here the legacy of gorge formation - the dry wieds of Malta - during the humid late Pleistocene, and the small scale erosional etching of all major and minor geological and structural junctions have resulted in there being very little land of low gradient.

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palms and pomegranates alongside potatoes - but in no case are conditions optimal or yields very good. In the comparatively closed economies of the past this mattered little; in an era of world trade and world markets Malta has now been left behind. Large-scale cotton production has virtually ceased and that of citrus fruit is declining; viticulture is of low standard and the olive tree very rare. Cereals can now provide only a tiny fraction of local needs while fodder production is limited in season and type by water shortage.

The critical phase in the social and economic reactions to the physical situation has also been reached. In the simple peasant communities of the past, the creative manual effort was necessarily associated with a low valuation of individual human effort and an arduous and restricted life. Now, however, economic and social opportunities and desires have widened and with them has come impatience with the demands imposed by the artificial landscape.

Higher per capita productivity to assure more freedom and leisure is only quickly attainable by technical and mechanical innovation. It is just such innovation that is impossible on a large scale on the land of Malta.

The slope analysis map (Fig. 28) illustrates one aspect of the problem. Maltese soil 12 inches deep needs, as a minimum amount, terracing at horizontal intervals of about 20 feet. Anything wider in the way of fields or a deeper soil makes essential increasingly higher and stronger retaining walls. The problem is such that considerable control is exercised by dip as well as gradient. The amount of labour involved in maintenance is heartbreaking by modern standards and yet, without it, erosion is quickly followed by the complete stripping away of the soil down to bare rock. The scale of farming operations often has to be very small - the planting of single rows of beans, of single trees, the sowing of chick-peas in rock crevices. Power and tool application is severely restricted. Small and light implements and single draught animals or more recently 'rotavators' alone can negotiate this type of terrain and work very thin soils covering rock platforms. The dangerous effect of the abandonment of any land is obvious. The past has in fact enchained the present. If cultivation is to continue then in order to preserve the artificial ecological balance, created with such effort over the centuries, a social imbalance will become even stronger. Whatever the scale of farming the farmer will always have to grub for soil, build his terraces, carry his plough or manhandle his rotavator for long hours under conditions that will seem less attractive even than those of casual dockside and urban labour.

The first point then is that the landscape indicates how human effort is pinned down by the artificial environment and how restive man is becoming.

The second theme is concerned with the reasons for the historical process of what really amounts to landscape gardening, and with the underlying implications.

Malta's wealth, in historical times at least, has come from a large extra-territorially derived income which has resulted from the Island's positional value. It is possible that even in prehistoric times Malta was never self-sufficient. The great temple building cultures of Malta and Gozo may well have maintained their master masons on imported wealth. Certainly Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and Normans all occupied Malta because of its strategic position and took wealth in rather than removed it. The Order of St. John held it as an outpost of Christendom maintained by the Knights' possessions on the European mainland. Britain has similarly supported the Island's economy in return for its use as a naval, military and more recently a strategic air centre. Because of Malta's positional importance its inhabitants found it necessary and worth while to create agricultural resources. Because Malta has usually been an outpost the society and its works have attained the unstable equilibrium of a siege life.

At least since Arab occupation a duality has appeared in the community. Earliest at Mdina, later in the Three Cities, then in Valletta and the whole Grand Harbour complex, and now around the naval, military and air bases, the garrisons have formed successive nuclei of a cosmopolitan and sophisticated community. This community, literate, trained in the professions and trades has

[See pp. 98-B and 98-C -- Analyst]

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369 formed a facade behind which has hidden an old slow-changing and parochial Malta.

The towns are Italianate in character, the farm buildings archaically indigenous; the city dwellers speak a Maltese liberally sprinkled with European loanwords, the countryfolk's language is more strongly semitic. The urban place [103] names are usually historical or religious in character - Valletta, Kingsway or Strada Reale, Triq San Pietru; in the country one finds the older elements - Zebbug, place of the olive, Hamrija - red soil, Kalanka - hard stone. The Three Cities themselves have two sets of names - Kospikwa, Senglea, Vittoriosa for the Knights and their successors, Bormla, Isla and Birgu for the people. Architecture, language, place names, consumption patterns, even temperament still divide the two sections of the community. The farmers' forebears who helped to build Valletta on the barren Xibberas peninsula, and the citadels, the coastal towers, literally built a stone curtain which cut off their descendants from the outside world. These two societies, one cosmopolitan, one parochially Boeotian, have existed until recently in a fairly amicable symbiotic relationship. The country produced the labour and the iron rations of agricultural produce, the cities supplied the markets and provided the basis of defence.

178 Under British occupation however, and during the social and technical revo-
369 lutions of the nineteenth century, this balance started to break down. For the
464 first time, considerable opportunities of non-rural employment became available. The high tide of pressure on land resources started to ebb in the last decades of the nineteenth century, leaving a flood mark of land laid out but never taken [166] up in the western hills. Labour started leaving full time farming, villages such as Safi lost population to new centres like Kalafrana. There has been an actual and psychological diminishing of that pressure on land resource that brought the present landscape into being. In spite of a three-fold increase in 150 years, the population rising to over 300,000, the number of full-time farmers is now probably smaller than it was 50 years ago.

178 A third estate and a new imbalance have been created. Fifty-eight per cent.
182 of the gainfully employed population works for the Government and Service
464 Departments, as compared with less than 10 per cent. in full-time agriculture. This section of the community, once it has severed its roots in the land, is also [167] apt to sever its connection with Malta. Net emigration between 1945 and 1954 totalled over 45,000 and the population total now fluctuates rather than shows a steady increase. It has been fortunate that the direct pressure on land has slackened since the demands directly and indirectly to support the garrisons have grown with inexorable inevitability. Forts, naval bases and airfields, storage depots and houses - many more houses, have devoured scanty land. This conflict of interests has always been present - long before the conflicting needs of flying boats and fishing fleets caused trouble in 1956. The breaking down of the old equilibrium is caused by a variety of forces and in turn further strengthens these forces. Environmental limitation of personal opportunity has become as irksome as the desire for national political independence and the necessity for economic dependence. Social policy urged on by growing needs is hamstrung by natural poverty. In town and country alike a painful groping towards a new equilibrium at a twentieth century level is manifest.

Lastly what of the response to these challenges? What are the reasons for the slowness of recent adjustment? Fear, lack of security, the very factors that made Malta important as an outpost and earned her a George Cross are also responsible for many of her difficulties. The distribution of settlements is one indicator of this fear. In the traditional area of invasion and attack, the broken lands of the West, there occurs only one town, Mellieha, and even this, hidden from the sea in a defensible position, has only grown rapidly in the last 80 years. Another indicator is the strength of the Church and the general devotion it commands. Vast wealth and effort has gone into the building and adorning of the individual churches - symbols of one type of guardianship.

178 Fear - inherent or acquired - has hindered development in many ways.
182 Industry and commerce have never fully flowered because local capital has always
454 flown to areas of less risk. How can it be blamed? Even 25 years ago, who would

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[954]

have guaranteed that the United Kingdom would not have abandoned Malta in the event of war in the Mediterranean? Those Maltese possessing power and knowledge traditionally have had too much to lose by local investment. The inadequacy of commercial port handling facilities, the paucity of processing industries, the shortage of credit, all these are products of fear.

Moreover, the changing circumstances of Mediterranean life which have increased security have also deprived Malta of her most easily earned income from entrepôt trade and her value as a calling station. The old commercial and financial attitudes of the most sophisticated part of society have become anachronisms in a new age, but still remain locally very deadening in their encouragement of hand-to-mouth activity.

What of old Malta? There the problem is one of breaking down isolation and correcting mental indigestion. The farmers of Malta have been commercially minded and experimentally inclined for centuries. Production for sale and exchange is the rule rather than the exception. But in fact they have little knowledge of commercial possibilities nor are they able to deal on equal terms with merchants. Often prepared to try new crops and equipment, their ignorance concerning the processes involved produces unhappy results. In short, the rural community in its partial isolation has seized with avidity a few crumbs of opportunity and knowledge and has never properly assimilated them.

It is a divided Malta that has met the new challenge, each sector too burdened with its past to respond vigorously on its own initiative.

The historic creation of an artificial environment has imposed severe restrictions on methods of utilising land, both now and in the future. The historic reasons for that creation have produced an ambivalent society, one part hampered by fear, one part hampered by ignorance. The main need now is for political security and a certain amount of economic stability. With security and stability the extrovert community may plough in its wealth rather than keep it poised for flight. The introvert rural community can then in turn translate its traditional experience into scientific idiom. In a suitable socio-economic climate and in an undivided society, many things could flourish, export market gardening and horticulture, processing industries, tourism, entrepôt trade and even sub-tropical research and training. Without such development, as is already foreshadowed in the landscape, Malta will become stagnant, depending on war and rumours of war for anything more than starvation level existence, while the landscape itself will reveal more and more of those rocky bare bones so decently interred in the past.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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665 were transformed from propaganda and social centres into instruments of government. As the village branches of the party in power, they represented government in the eyes of the people, if not the civil servants. They transmitted and explained the policy of the administration and they channelled requests to the appro- [645] priate authorities. Ministers made use of the Local Committees for business at the village level, since the Committees generally provided their only direct contact with the villages.

IV

● 182 The State, the Church and the political parties are thus the 64 national organizations which affect the lives of the people at the 665 village level. The State is highly centralized, and has no political 795 representatives in the villages. In contrast to the State, the Church has its official representatives in every village and hamlet. They are firmly controlled from above. The structure of the Malta Labour Party also rests firmly on its village level organization. The differing structural frameworks of these organizations have a direct bearing on this study. While competition for power at the national level between the State, on the one hand, and the Church or political parties, on the other, can often lead to bitter disputes, such conflict rarely causes division at the village level. In contrast, disputes at the national level between the political parties, or between a political party and the Church are transmitted immediately through their respective structures to the level of the village. There they bring about a conflict of interest which reflects the struggle for power at the national level.

Z: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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house to house, transform the streets into gaily lighted tunnels. The piazza is usually draped in flags, and all the clubs are also dressed in their festal finery and their doors thrown open to the public. Many bands are hired and the mountains of fireworks are fused and made ready. All this is done before the visitors from outside arrive, and involves a great deal of organization, time and money.

The festa is thus an occasion on which communal values are reaffirmed and strengthened, as individuals and groups express their loyalty to their patron saint and unite to defend and enhance the reputation of their village. At the same time, the central position which the Church occupies in the social structure is strongly reinforced, for the parish church is the hub around which this festive occasion turns.

A festa is also an occasion on which the bonds of kinship are reinforced, for each family opens its doors to its relations, especially to those who live in other villages. Grown sons and daughters return to their parental home, forming, for a few hours, a grand family with a depth of three or four generations. Because of this influx of relatives, younger children learn to recognize more distant relatives whom they might not see at any other time of the year, and become aware of the network of kin relations that stretches out from their home. As parents become momentarily more indulgent during the festa and relax their watchfulness, it is also a favourite meeting time for courting couples and a traditional occasion on which marriageable boys and girls are introduced to one another.

The celebration of a village festa usually lasts three days. It consists of religious ceremonies, which take place principally within the church, and secular celebrations outside the church. The Maltese themselves make a distinction between these two elements in the festa: they call the former the 'internal feast' (*il-festa ta' ġewwa*) and the latter the 'external feast' (*il-festa ta' barra*). These often take place simultaneously. The mixture of sacred and profane which results was shown to me very vividly during one of the first festas I attended. I was in the church during a particularly solemn moment of the service of worship. Suddenly there was a nerve-shattering burst of fireworks from the roof of the church. Then, slowly, the sharp smell of burning gunpowder began to drift in through the open doors and mingle with the pungent odour of candles and incense. After that I ceased to be

178 for a man to provide his marrying daughter with as sub-
583 stantial a dowry as possible. This was partly in kind:
183 land, animals, etc., and partly in money. The size of a
[554] girl's dowry was one of the indications of social position and for many a poor man the provision of it would represent sacrifice and saving over many years, especially where there were several marriageable daughters in one family. In the past, many farmers' sons could expect to find brides among the families of the same village and farming background.
● [182] Thus a dowry of land or other property was an admirable way of building a farm-holding and was one of the counters to fragmentation consequent upon the system of land inheritance (B/525). Such an arrangement caused the minimum disruption in work and residence. However, as contacts between parts of the Islands have increased and marriages between individuals from different villages and also from differing economic backgrounds have become more common, a dowry of land is often quite inappropriate. Money takes its place and the desire for financial accumulation on the part of the fathers of girls of marriageable age leads them to put more emphasis on money and its investment.

178 Another development which has put money into an altogether
454 new perspective for the Maltese farmer has been his growing
423 desire to own the house in which he lives. As seen
471 (Section 2), most of the land worked by the farmers in the Islands is not owned by the operator concerned and this applies to the farm buildings and the house occupied by the family. As the farmer becomes ownership-conscious the first step is understandably to acquire his own home, a feature observed by the 1911 Commissioners. Having bought his house, the farmer turns his attention to the purchase of other parts of the land which he cultivates, but, even before doing this, he wants capital to enable him to build up the live-stock side of his holding. The importance of meat and dairy stock-raising (v. Section 2) has increased rapidly in recent years - especially since the 1939-45 War, and the need for capital in such cases is clearly much greater than in a farm unit based solely on arable cultivation where lease- or rental-holding is a convenient and accepted method of tenure (B/525).

178 Similarly, the spread of mechanization in Maltese
654 farming after 1945 (v. Section 2) brought in a need for
[426] capital. The Government added to this money consciousness with financial encouragement to farmers (in an effort to keep them on the land) in the form of very low interest loans for capital improvements of the farms and their equipment. The Government policy in connexion with milk